



Peru

International Religious Freedom Report 2005

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The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 496,225 square miles, and its population is approximately 27.9 million. Among the major religious communities are the Roman Catholic, various Protestant denominations (including Baptists, Anglican, Assembly of God, and many others), Seventh-day Adventist, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, Jewish, Baha'i, Hare Krishna, and Muslim. There also are indigenous communities practicing various forms of pre-Columbian and syncretistic (blending Christian and pre-Columbian) beliefs, as well as a unique and well-organized local faith, the Israelites of the New Universal Pact. The Cuanto Institute, a nongovernmental organization (NGO), estimates that 80 percent of the population identifies itself as Roman Catholic, although the Catholic NGO Episcopal Commission for Social Action (CEAS) estimates that only 15 percent of Roman Catholics regularly attend weekly church services. The memberships of most faiths remain at fairly constant levels; however, various evangelical Christian denominations have rapidly increasing congregations. According to some estimates, in the last 20 years, their representation has grown from 2 to 3 percent of the population to 10 to 15 percent.

Using the 1993 census information (the most recent available), the National Statistics Institute (INEI) estimates that Protestants, the majority of whom are evangelical or Pentecostal, constitute 7.2 percent of the population. This likely underreports the size of this rapidly expanding group. The National Evangelical Council (CONEP) estimates that evangelicals represent 12 percent of the population. The INEI estimate for evangelicals also includes nonevangelical groups such as the Mormons, Seventh-day Adventists, and Jehovah's Witnesses. INEI estimates that adherents of non-Christian faiths account for approximately 2.5 percent of the population, while agnostics and atheists constitute 1.4 percent. Historically, evangelicals resided in areas outside of Lima, the capital, and in rural rather than urban areas; however, in the last 15 years, their numbers in urban areas have increased significantly. There are small Jewish populations in Lima and Cuzco and small Muslim populations in Lima (mostly of Palestinian origin) and Tacna (predominantly of Pakistani origin).

Some Catholics combine indigenous worship with Catholic traditions. This type of syncretistic religion is practiced most often in the Andean mountain highlands. Indigenous peoples in the remote eastern jungles also practice traditional faiths. The founder of the Israelites of the New Universal Pact (not connected to Israel or the Jewish faith) organized the group in 1960 in Junin Department; most adherents are concentrated in and near Lima.

Foreign missionary groups, including Mormons and several evangelical organizations, operate freely throughout the country, although they do not receive the same treatment in the areas of customs, immigration, and taxation that is given to the Catholic Church.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. Article 50 of the

Constitution establishes separation of church and state but recognizes the Catholic Church's role as "an important element in the historical, cultural, and moral development of the nation." The Government acts independently of Catholic Church policy. Nonetheless, it maintains a close relationship with the Church, and a concordat signed with the Vatican in 1980 grants the Catholic Church special status. Non-Catholic critics complain that the concordat was executed between the Vatican and the last military government and thus does not reflect the current democratic vision of equality. Officials of the Church sometimes play a high profile role in the public sector.

The Constitution specifically prohibits discrimination based on religion; however, preferential treatment is given to the Catholic Church in education, tax benefits, immigration of religious workers, and other areas. This has continued to raise concerns about unequal treatment of non-Catholics engaged in similar activities.

The Executive Branch regulates religious affairs through the Ministry of Justice. The Ministry issues resolutions that implement laws, and historically the Ministry interacted with the public through an office of relations with the Catholic Church. In 2002, the Ministry established a second Religious Affairs office for non Catholic religions. Both offices maintain a continuing dialogue with the Catholic Church and a coalition of all other religions to reform the resolution that requires registration by all religious groups.

In 2004, the Ministry of Justice promulgated a regulation designed to enhance religious freedom and equality by providing for the registration of churches so that they may receive official status; however, this registration process has provoked controversy. Some evangelical Christian churches complain that the Government makes it difficult for them to register because new, independent churches continue to be founded, while government regulations require that a church be operating for several years before it can register. In addition, because many evangelical churches do not have central lines of authority and lack sufficient doctrinal similarities for the Government to group them together, evangelical organizations complain that the current registration process requires each individual evangelical church to register as a separate religion. At the end of the period covered by this report, evangelical groups were in negotiations with the Ministry of Justice to revise the regulations to permit the major evangelical umbrella organizations, CONEP and the Union of Evangelical Christian Churches of Peru, to register their member churches as one group. Other groups that are more hierarchical and longer established support strict registration requirements as a deterrent to fraudulent or misleading registrations.

All faiths are free to establish places of worship, train clergy, and proselytize, but contrary to past practice, religious denominations or churches are now required to register with the Government. The primary function of the Religious Affairs Unit in the Ministry of Justice is to process complaints of religious discrimination. This unit also serves to ensure that all faith groups receive certain financial benefits, such as exemption from some import taxes and customs duties beyond the historic preferences granted to the Catholic Church. During the period covered by this report, the unit did not receive any discrimination complaints; however, the existence of the office was not widely known or publicized outside of Lima.

Conversion from one religion to another is respected, and missionaries are allowed to enter the country and proselytize without following any special procedures. Some non-Catholic missionary groups claim that the law discriminates against them by taxing religious materials, including Bibles, that they bring into the country, while the Catholic Church has not been taxed on such items. Reform of the church registration resolution was designed to remove this discrimination.

Roman Catholicism, the Catholic Church, and Catholic clergy receive preferential treatment and tangible benefits from the State in the areas of education, taxation of personal income, remuneration, and taxation of institutional property. All work related earnings of Catholic priests and bishops are exempt from income taxes. Real estate, buildings, and houses owned by the Catholic Church are exempt from property taxes; other religious groups (depending on the municipal jurisdiction) must pay property taxes for schools and clergy residences. Some Catholic clergy receive state remuneration in addition to the stipends paid to them by the Catholic Church. This applies to the country's 52 bishops as well as priests whose ministries are located in towns and villages along the country's borders. In addition, each diocese receives a monthly institutional subsidy from the Government. According to Catholic Church officials, none of these payments are substantial. However, the Freedom of Conscience Institute (PROLIBCO), an NGO that favors strict separation of church and state and opposes the preferential treatment accorded to the Catholic Church, claims that the financial subsidies and tax benefits are far more widespread and lucrative than publicly acknowledged. Some groups complain that Catholic bishops, for example, receive government expense allowances of approximately \$3,000 (9,900 soles) per month for which the bishops do not have to account.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Catholic charities do not have to pay customs duties; however, non-Catholics with extensive charitable activities complain that donations of goods from abroad are taxed at commercial rates. Ongoing registration reform is designed to allow duty free import of charitable goods, but at the end of the period covered by this report, it was unclear how the Ministry of Justice-driven registration reform would be applied to the customs service.

Immigration discrimination against missionaries or clergy from non-Catholic faiths is frequently cited as impinging on religious freedom. Residency documents show an immigrating Catholic priest to be in a "Religious-Catholic" category, but there is no category for non-Catholic religious officials. As a result, clergy or missionaries from other faiths go through a lengthy immigration process that Catholics are exempt from, including a requirement to leave the country every 6 months and reapply for a visa. There were no reports that non-Catholic clergy were denied admission because of their religious status. At the end of the period covered by this report, religious groups, the congressional committee on religion, and the Ministry of Justice were working to add a category for "Non-Catholic Religious Worker" to immigration regulations.

The General Education Law mandates that all schools, public and private, impart religious education as part of the curriculum throughout the education process (primary and secondary), "without violating the freedom of conscience of the student, parents, or teachers." Catholicism is the only religion taught in public schools. Many non-Catholic parochial or secular private schools have been granted exemptions from this requirement. The Education Ministry has made it mandatory for public school authorities to appoint religious education teachers upon individual recommendations and approval by the presiding bishop of the area. The major complaint of non-Catholic organizations is that although their adherents may be exempted from attending Catholic instruction, the students who do so lose academic credits. Students who graduate from primary and secondary schools without these credits cannot be at the top of their class regardless of other academic achievements they attain. These students are then disadvantaged in competitions for scholarships or for admission to universities with competitive entry requirements.

Parents who do not wish their public school children to participate in the mandatory religion classes must request an exemption in writing from the school principal. Unlike in previous years, during the period covered by this report and the previous period, there were no complaints that requests for exemptions from Catholic religious instruction had been denied. Non-Catholics who wish their children to receive a religious education in their own faith are free to organize such classes, at their own expense, during the weekly hour allotted by the school for religious education; however, they must supply their own teacher.

By law, the military may employ only Catholic clergy as chaplains, and Catholicism is the only recognized religion of military personnel. A 1999 government decree creating 40 Catholic military chaplaincies obliges members of the armed forces and the police, as well as their civilian coworkers and relatives, to participate in such services. There have been no reports of discrimination or denials of promotion for non-Catholic members of the military, nor have there been any reports of personnel refusing to participate in Catholic services. As the number of non-Catholic Christians increases in the military, reflecting the increase in the number of evangelical Protestants nationwide, non-Catholic soldiers segregated in barracks find it difficult to attend religious services when no chaplains or chaplains' assistants exist for them.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Religious groups occasionally join forces in ecumenical works on behalf of the poor. The Catholic Church and evangelical churches collaborate closely in the area of human rights. The Catholic Church uses evangelical church staff in rural areas to minister to its congregations when there is no priest available.

The Catholic Church (through the CEAS) and CONEP (through its loosely affiliated Peace and Hope Evangelical Association) have conducted joint national campaigns on behalf of prison inmates and detainees wrongly charged or sentenced for terrorism and treason.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Embassy staff met with leaders of numerous religious communities, including representatives of the Roman Catholic Church, the Jewish community, and Protestant groups. The Embassy also continued to maintain regular contact with religious organizations involved in the protection of human rights, including the CEAS, the Interreligious Committee of Peru, the Peace and Hope Evangelical Association, and the Freedom of Conscience Institute.

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